

RUNNING THE WORLD

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While on her annual trip back to her home town of Dunedin, Hollie Woodhouse caught up with Anna Frost to see what makes this woman so successful on the international trail running stage.

DURING JULY LAST year I was lucky enough to head to the Alps of Chamonix in France to spend a magical week trail running. Almost everyone who lives here or visits this place is in some way connected to the outdoors or adventure scene. Being a kiwi traveller, normally when you mention that you are from New Zealand, that tiny country near the edge of the world (no, not part of Australia) people usually reply with 'oh, home of the All Blacks.' So it was quite a surprise, and extremely refreshing to hear instead 'oh, where Anna Frost comes from. Do you know her?'

It's well known that New Zealand is small and usually the chances are that yes, I would know her, but not this time. I had heard of her, I knew she was a trail runner and quite a good one at that, but curiosity got the better of me and after a quick

search on Google I was slightly ashamed that I didn't know more.

This inspiring kiwi girl from New Zealand's southern-most city of Dunedin is nothing short of a legend. Part of the Salomon Running Team, she spends most of her year traveling to amazing places to compete in trail running races, or the next event she would like to tick off her bucket list. Not only does she fly the flag for the kiwis, but more often than not she is standing on the podium at the end of the day too.

Anna returns to New Zealand around Christmas time each year for a couple of months to unwind, give her body a much-needed rest and catch up with family and friends. It's normally her downtime as the northern hemisphere gets through its winter months, but she admits herself she's





“As an athlete I aspire to be the very best I can. As a person I aspire to never stop learning, to never forget that we have one life, that nature is our prime source of energy. Here we are always free. The world is our playground, with just one limit – our own.” – Anna Frost

a sucker for punishment and always ends up competing in the odd race while she is home.

She finds coming home quite weird. “It’s wonderful,” she quickly adds, “when it gets to the last race of the season, I need it.” She refers to it as being like a split personality; she sees herself as one person in the race season and a totally different person when she gets home. She puts it down to being so comfortable in her hometown, “I know the streets, and I don’t have to think when I am driving. If I want a good coffee I know where to go.” It’s these minor things that make life so calm and easy, it’s like being in a bubble. “Trail running isn’t as big in New Zealand as it is overseas. If I am in the Canary Islands, or Chamonix

in France, I get mugged!” People stop her in the street, wanting photos and autographs, but when she comes back home people struggle with the concept that she’s a runner who runs for a living. She enjoys the contrast of the two very different worlds.

Having a huge support network behind her makes it a lot easier to travel to so many different places. Her friends from home are extremely supportive, even if they think what she’s doing is slightly crazy. “They’re all really proud of what I do and am happy for me, especially when I’m doing well!” Her parents always believe in her and have always told her that there shouldn’t be anything standing in her way. Travel shouldn’t be an issue in wanting to achieve her dreams. “My family don’t

have to be with me to be supporting me,” she says, “I know that they believe in me and think about me. I know they’re there with me with every race I do and I know they’re proud of me. You don’t just do it for yourself. You do it because they love you and you want to do well for them too.”

But it’s really the Salomon team that are her rock. “They’re absolutely my family and my best friends as well. When you spend so much time on the road you learn a lot about each other and experience all your highs as well as your lows with them. That’s a really touching thing when you can see that and have that emotion with them.” It’s not just Salomon, but the whole circuit who are all together racing for the same values and passions that make them



want to compete. “The circuit’s really nice, everyone is so tight-knit,” she says. Plus she gets to travel to some of the most beautiful places in the world.

From as early as she can remember adventure has always been a big part of her life. Born in Invercargill, her family then moved to Papua New Guinea where they stayed until she was five years old. She recalls snippets of these memories, “people with black hands with pink palms.” She accepted it at the time as the way they were living, but she had a sense it wasn’t normal. Being bought into this lifestyle of travel and moving around was an adventure in itself and would set the tone for the years ahead.

She sees adventure as anything that involves an exploration. “It could be anywhere; exploring animals in your backyard or heading down to the beach to collect shells. It doesn’t have

to be huge. It’s about experiencing new things, seeing new things and I’m just lucky that what I get to see is so amazing.” While traveling for the good part of year does take its toll physically as well as emotionally, she still gets just as excited by going to new places. “It reignites the fire to know you are going to somewhere you haven’t been before. It’s about the journey as much as the experience.”

She sees travel and running as going hand in hand. She can race while having an objective to her travel. She is fortunate to have sponsors who back her and believe in her enough to support her full time. They can see her passion for running and traveling, and are happy to share those experiences with her. “The great thing is that I’m always backed by a team who support me 100 per cent. That makes it a lot easier. It’s nerve wracking traveling somewhere new on your own, unable to

speak the language or know your way around.” She finds it so much easier knowing that someone is going to meet her there, or when she travels with others. “It takes so much pressure off; it enables you to just go.”

It wasn’t until she entered the National Mountain Running Championships in Cardrona, just outside of Queenstown, that she gave running a serious thought. Coming in with a podium finish meant she qualified for the World Mountain Running Championships in Italy in 2004 and fell in love straight away. She recalls being there and thinking, “this is it, this is exactly what I want to do.” It opened her mind to the idea that she could turn this love into a career. A huge step for a young kiwi girl, she says, “I didn’t run particularly well in that race because I was too busy looking around thinking ‘wow’.”



Image: Chris Ord





Heading to the UK and Europe in 2005, she was sponsored by INOV-8, and travelled the world following the World Mountain Running Grand Prix. Each race is basically running straight up a hill (or mountain), which are generally anywhere between 10-18 kilometres in distance. "It's a cool circuit because you can race all the time, it's not demanding on your body." Wanting to take a step forward she entered the Skyrunning scene after Salomon offered her the chance to go to Nepal in 2009 to compete in The Everest, her first mountain marathon. She leapt at the chance and hasn't looked back.

Everywhere she goes is amazing, but her highlight is when she sees someone succeeding. It doesn't have to be the leader, or the elite athlete either; it's when the everyday person achieves his or her goal. It's those moments that really stick with her. "Yes the places are incredible but I think it's seeing those emotions, that's the thing that stays in your memory," she says. She is aware of the people who line up behind her,

who have sacrificed so much to get to the same start line, "just normal people doing extra-ordinary things."

Everywhere she travels offers something new. Dunedin was at the top of her list, but she finds each place offers something new. "If I have to chose one place other than New Zealand it would have to be Nepal. It's absolutely mind-blowing and every time I am there I feel so lifted. The mountains remind you of how tiny and insignificant you are, and I love that. It's a really important thing for humanity to have as a reminder that we are such a tiny part in such a huge scale," she says. The people who have so little compared to the western world are some of the nicest people she knows. "They are so loving, they have so much to give and it's such a humbling experience."

Last year, 2014, was a hugely successful one for her. She won numerous races, some with race records, but she says the highlight was managing to get to the end of the year and still be able to run.

"My goal was to get to the end without an injury. I had races planned but for me in the end if I came 100th in every race and I finished healthy, I would have been happy." She believes this is because she removed the pressure to win, which meant she approached each race in a fit and healthy state of mind. She completed her first 100-miler (161 kilometres), which she says was "a very, very awesome experience." She loved it, but she's quick to tell me that doesn't mean she is now a 100-mile runner.

It's not all running that consumes her life though. It's not hard to believe her when she says she's not very good at sitting still. In her down time she likes to get out on her bike, go stand-up paddle boarding or play in the sea. Even when she is in the mountains training she likes to come home and do yoga, or go for a swim, adding, "I'd like to read more, I don't read enough." She also has a very creative side to her, making her own jewellery from everyday objects she finds on her travels. "A lot of the stuff I have found on the beach, so there are maybe

only one or two things of each." She is limited to one little cookie jar filled with her creations when she is on the road, "so if it doesn't fit, it doesn't go."

Looking ahead to 2015 she's excited about races she has planned, including Transvalcania in the Canary Islands, where she currently holds the race record. Also on the list is the Hardrock Hundred Mile Endurance Run based in Southern Colorado's San Juan Range in the USA. It's a race that she has always wanted to do after running over parts of the course a few years earlier. Consisting of 100.5 miles in length, with more than 20,000 metres of elevation change, the fastest women usually come in in a little over 26 hours. Extremely hard to get in to, you have to enter through a ballot system to secure your place. Having a 1.1% chance of getting a spot, she managed to somehow defy those extraordinary odds and find her name on the starting list. "I was so excited," she says "I couldn't wait to tell our photographer because I had talked about it non-stop."

She's still a kiwi girl at heart though, with the idea of coming back to New Zealand and settling down someday. "Dunedin is home and a really special and comfortable place. I love Queenstown and Wanaka too, so I don't really know where just yet." But in terms of her life, she feels there's still so much left to do. "I've got my teaching that I can't wait to go back to. I'd like to get in to more personal training, especially helping young mums with their babies." She believes this is an area with a lot of opportunity that isn't getting touched on enough just yet, not only in New Zealand but overseas as well. She wants to keep traveling too; non-running travel that is. "I love the feeling of traveling with a tiny backpack, just some light shoes on your feet. Just going and not having to think about anything in the long-run."

Not surprisingly though she does have some running travel planned, but with a slight twist. Later in the year, along with Tour de Trails, she will front an eight-day tour through the remote Himalayan ranges in Bhutan, covering

between 20-30 kilometres per day. Having one of the world's best trail runners as your guide, it doesn't get much better than this for anyone with a passion for getting off-road.

Anna is an extremely talented individual and a great role model to both young and old. So it comes as no surprise that she has just been made an ambassador for SisuGirls, a social enterprise whose mission is to inspire and encourage girls to be determined, brave and resilient. This aligns perfectly with her belief that there is a huge opportunity for kids to be empowered and motivated through sport and adventure.

Whatever she tries her hand at; you can guarantee that she won't be sitting down relaxing. "I don't have time for that," she smiles.

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